



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
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POLICY PAPER

# COORDINATING EU EXTERNAL ACTION ON MIGRATION: **A TIMELY IMPERATIVE**

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# INTRODUCTION

Migration is among the most pressing topics on the international agenda today. Worldwide almost 300 million people live outside their home country, and it is estimated that ca. 65 million people have been displaced by violence and forced to choose irregular pathways of migration. 20 million of them are refugees. It is a global challenge that does not bypass any continent. In recent years, Europe has had to face the most severe migratory emergency since World War II. In 2015 and 2016, ca. 2,6 million first-time asylum applicants were registered in the European Union (EU). The numbers decreased in the following years to dramatically raise again in 2022 as a result of the Russian full-scale aggression on Ukraine.

Large movements of refugees and migrants affect the entire EU and all its Members States. Nonetheless, some political leaders have refused to see it as a common concern, clearing themselves of responsibilities for the future of Europe. Short-sighted, often cynical, politicians have blamed for the crisis their counterparts in other regions of Europe, building new conflicts between states and peoples. More specifically, Eastern Europeans became opposed to Southern Europeans, and vice versa. Eastern Europe did not understand what was happening in the Mediterranean, why they should contribute to finding a solution for a crisis that was taking place on idyllic islands, why they should host people invited by Western and Northern European governments. In turn, Southern Europeans did not understand why they should listen to these nations on the Eastern frontier, why they should pay attention to the far-away border of Belarus and orders coming from Moscow. The lack of communication and solidarity resulted with deepening divisions and increased costs.

The latter ones were not only purely financial, but foremost political and from the area of security. Without common response the EU became vulnerable to its internal and external enemies. Not only all kinds of dictators and warlords could hit the EU using people who desperately wanted to come to Europe, but also anti-European, anti-liberal and anti-democratic forces within Member States grew in strength. Encouraged by lack of European solidarity and coordination during the crisis, enemies of the European integration gained a greater foothold. Extremist parties and right-wing populists won seats in parliaments all over Europe and formed governments, i.a. in Hungary, Poland and Italy. Consequences of this success have been severe for the EU, its stability and development.

## LIBERAL APPROACHES TO MIGRATION

European liberals have not been afraid of migration. They have been willing to find constructive solutions for this global issue in the spirit of respect for human rights, trust in multilateral cooperation and fostering good-neighborly relations. Liberals perceive migration as a global issue that must be seen in a broad perspective, together with, among others, combating climate change, promotion of the rules-based world order, effective development aid.

Exemplification of the liberal approach towards migration is the current paper “Coordinating EU External Actions on Migration: A Timely Imperative”, an analysis by members of the FNF Madrid Migration Policy Group. It stresses that the instrumentalisation of migration should be answered by revising EU’s own policies and strategies in order to sufficiently respond to this reality. We see an urgency in updating its previous strategies in order to adequately define and co-create timely policies, which reflect current developments and provides sustainable solutions for its citizens. It makes the case that tailor-made and mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries are key to achieving coherent and effective external action, and calls for a ‘more for more’ approach.

An example of a liberal initiative which aims to develop tools to strengthen partnership in the area of migration policies is the Migration Policy Group created by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom’s office in Madrid, in the framework of the Mediterranean Dialogue project. The Migration Policy Group was initiated in 2020 by policy- and decision makers, and experts, from various liberal parties and organizations. It coordinates the work of policy makers - including Members of the European Parliament, members of national parliaments, regional and local elected officials - and experts to harmonize proposals and political action addressing migration issues. The unique nature of the group resides in its geographical diversity. The Policy Group’s members come from both Southern Europe – Spain, Italy, Portugal; Eastern Europe – Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia; and West Africa – Senegal, Morocco, Cote d’Ivoire; and the Middle East. Because of the composition, the Policy Group serves as a much-needed platform of cooperation between different regions allowing reciprocal learning and sensitizing according to the rules of mutually beneficial partnerships. What is worth noting, these processes within the group occur not only on the ‘Southern Europe – Eastern Europe’ line, but also between Europe and Africa, which confirms the originality of the project.

# THE FNF MADRID MIGRATION POLICY GROUP

## Three Fundamental Axis: Origin, Transit and Destination Countries

The FNF Madrid Migration Policy Group is also characterized by its wide and exhaustive scope of interest. It covers three fundamental axes of the political analysis of the migration phenomenon: the countries of destination, transit and origin.

The Policy Group members look for solutions how to manage migration so that it maximizes the benefits for and minimizes the negative effects on destination, transit and origin countries, as well as migrants themselves. Such an approach allows to leave the purely Euro-centric perspective, facilitating real dialogue with neighbouring countries and regions. Analyzing the issue from the destination countries' point of view is important but also incomplete and unfair. Including both the countries of transit and origin creates a platform for open discussion that will eventually lead to comprehensive solutions, embodying the 'more for more' approach. The latter one could replace the current EU's relations with third countries based on 'externalization' of border control, which leaves migrants and refugees at risk of exploitation, abuse and violence.

Evidence-based policies of the Policy Group have been drafted during a series of fact-finding missions in regions of origin, transit and destination. The first two events took place in Spain, being both a transit and destination country. The initial one was organized in 2021 in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and consisted of, among other, discussions with the Spanish Government Subdelegation and Spanish Commission for Refugees, presentations in Casa Africa and a visit to emergency centers. It was followed by a visiting programme in Barcelona, where challenges of migration were commented by representatives of local and regional government, as well as researchers from the University Autònoma of Barcelona (UAB) and the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed). Another stop was Dublin, where state officials and NGO activists explained how Ireland became a destination country and what is done for migrant communities to engage with all aspects of social, political and cultural life on an equal footing. The most recent event brought the gravity point to West Africa as it took place in Senegal in 2022. In Dakar, the Policy Group members met with an array of diverse entities that deal with migration, including members of the National Parliament, United Nations (UN) officers and representatives of local NGOs, but also get first-hand experience about migration experience from those who risked their lives in the attempt of reaching Europe, those who returned and members of their families and local communities.

## **Commitment: Connecting people and delivering solutions**

The Policy Group keeps working and planning activities. It has the ambition to serve liberal family in Europe and beyond by connecting policy makers and experts with the aim to deliver solutions. The effects are already seen, as the exchange of information and perspectives between Europe, Africa is multisectoral and vivid. The voice of the Policy Group, taking into account the knowledge, experience and political significance of its members, is heard in many countries. What is even more important, this voice influences the way migration is perceived by a number of political parties in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, and by some influential decision makers associated with the Policy Group. Thanks to this, the Policy Group has a chance to help shaping migration policy on the transnational level in the spirit of liberal values.

Liberals do not refuse to take responsibility for the future of Europe and do not avoid solidarity whenever major goals are on the horizon. A better, coherent migration policy, involving countries of transit and origin, promoting and respecting human rights is such a goal and a commitment of the FNF Madrid Migration Policy Group.

# COORDINATING EU EXTERNAL ACTIONS ON MIGRATION

In the last decades, the role of the EU as an actor on the international stage has grown, be it in foreign affairs and defence policies, development policy, migration, trade or even culture. As Europeans, we stand for and believe in a rules-based world order, founded on international law, multilateral cooperation, reciprocity, solidarity and good-neighbourly relations, the authors of this paper stands for cooperation with partners on all subjects and levels, based on human rights, rule of law and our common values. In order to achieve overall coherence and increase in the effectiveness of the different EU external policy domains, we advocate it is high time to improve coordination and exploit potential synergies.

In fact, when they are badly coordinated, the EU's increasingly interwoven external actions can also prove to be a weakness. A clear example of this phenomenon has been the Turkish and Belarussian government's attempts to instrumentalise migrants to pressure the EU in foreign and development policy matters. This instrumentalisation of migration is a development that has led to widespread interlinking of all sectors of government in policies of governments across the globe. This is presenting a challenge for the EU, which has to be answered by revising its own policies and strategies in order to sufficiently respond to this reality. In light of this conclusion, we see urgency in updating its previous strategies in order to adequately define and co-create timely policies, which reflect current developments and provides sustainable solutions for its citizens.

## **Integrated partnerships with third countries are the way forward.**

In this paper, we make the case that tailor-made and mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries are key to achieving coherent and effective external action. With these partnerships, the EU can provide a framework for better coordination of policies with third countries and create a win-win situation for both partners - based on human rights, rule of law and our common values.

Indeed, we advocate for a whole of government approach, combining all relevant external and internal policy aspects of government. This would include the areas of migration, foreign affairs, human rights, trade, culture, defence and development cooperation. Certain sectors such as humanitarian aid, which is based on the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality, should remain excluded from these partnerships.

These partnerships should be based primarily on a 'more for more' approach. By aligning and coordinating different policy areas, we can create positive incentives for partner countries and for Member States alike, resulting in an intensified and strengthened partnership. This can include cooperation on visa policies, return and readmission agreements, border management, fighting human trafficking/smuggling networks but also trade policies, student exchanges, labour mobility etc. This in turn can offer better and more opportunities to achieve the EU's objectives and ensure the protection of our interests and values in third-country cooperation.



# COORDINATING EU EXTERNAL ACTIONS ON MIGRATION

However, if the cooperation does not yield positive results, there should also be room for backtracking on cooperation. In fact, the partnerships should be evaluated by both partners on a yearly basis, encompassing all aspects of the partnership and requiring a minimum level of cooperation on all aspects of the agreement. Proportionate restrictive measures, such as visa restrictions, targeted sanctions, and exclusion from EU programmes and funding could be envisaged. However, restrictive measures should never be in contradiction with EU values or principles.

The European Commission has a vital role to play in stepping up engagement with any third country in which establishing a partnership is relevant, evaluating and -where applicable- modifying it according to the principles set out in this approach. This strategy should be supported and endorsed by the EU Member States, as a collective EU approach reaps far more benefits and strategic advantages than a single Member State can.

## **Migration and development: a case in point**

Coordinating migration and development policies in the framework of partnerships with third countries are a case in point. The refugee crisis of 2015/2016 and its aftermath clearly showed that the EU's existing institutional framework and policies on migration were -and unfortunately still remain - inadequate in managing migration to the EU. While the primary aim of the EU's development assistance is to eradicate poverty, protect the most vulnerable and to ensure peace and the protection of human rights and humanitarian law, development assistance can also contribute to stemming negative push factors of migration, such as forced displacement, poverty and lack of economic opportunities, conflict and instability, faulty border and migration management, food insecurity and natural disasters. If well designed, budgeted and coordinated, development assistance can therefore contribute to reducing irregular migration to the EU by helping to create the conditions for people to build an autonomous prosperous life at home.

Where there is room for improved cooperation, such as in the area of returns and readmissions to countries of origin, offering benefits such as favourable visa policies or circular labour migration schemes can incentivise our partners to uphold other commitments as regards to migration. But vice versa, in the case of a lack of cooperation in the partnership in areas such as return and readmission agreements, a decrease in cooperation could be the consequence. However, cutting development assistance funding in response to a lack of cooperation on policies such as readmissions and returns risks harming the end-receiver of the funding, the people in need and the most vulnerable, which then goes against the principle of development assistance.

This also goes against the EU's interest of reducing irregular migration and therefore does not achieve the intended end-result. In this case, it would make more sense to cut the development assistance funding going directly to the budgets of national and regional governments, thus making it an area of possible deduction in assistance and redirect the funding to international organisations working on the ground instead. In this way, the EU can hold governments responsible for their actions and fulfilment of their commitments, while ensuring that we keep true to our principles of supporting the most vulnerable.

## **An updated strategy**

In order to improve the overall coherence and effectiveness of EU external actions, we argue that it is necessary to establish and improve tailor-made and mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries. These partnerships provide a framework in which we can truly leverage and build synergies between all the legal and political frameworks on which EU relations with third countries are based.



